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INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1478
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000577

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV HA

SUBJECT: PM ALEXIS IN TROUBLE IN PARLIAMENT

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 370

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Both senate and chamber majorities are ready to give Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis a vote of no confidence, according to President of the Senate Joseph Lambert. The government under Alexis, in the view of his parliamentary opponents has few tangible accomplishments, and has not put "theory into practice." Lambert confided that President Rene Preval declined to endorse the prime minister when confronted with the possibility of a vote of no confidence, but added that the executive may offer up a cabinet reshuffle to try and appease Alexis' critics. Lambert estimated that the issue of Alexis would come to a head at the end of April, giving parliament time to act on several legislative matters and beef up its own public image. Lambert has acted, until now, as a kind of insurance policy for Alexis in parliament, quietly arguing for the need for stability in the face of parliamentary criticism of the government. His change in position marks a potentially crippling blow for Alexis. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a conversation with Poloffs on March 22, Lambert revealed that the PM's standing in parliament has worsened over the past several weeks: 17 of 29 senators and 65 of 99 deputies are prepared to give the PM a vote of no confidence: a majority vote in either of the houses is enough to bring down the government. Like Alexis, Lambert is a Lespwa member, thus some opposition parliamentarians have kept their discontent with Alexis from Lambert in the past. Recently, however, key members approached him to let him know that there was a strong consensus to open discussions on when, not if, parliament should give Alexis a vote of no confidence. Lambert stressed that Alexis "does not have enough weight" in parliament and that he is at this point "very susceptible" to the parliament's position. Asked if his own position in support of Alexis had changed, Lambert responded as that as senate president he had to take into account the views of a clear majority of his colleagues. This put him in a particularly delicate position, because as a Lespwa member he considered himself both a parliamentary leader and a member of President Preval's government.

¶3. (C) Polcouns asked if President Preval had canceled the Alexis' U.S. trip because he thought the Prime Minister needed to stay and mend his relationship with parliament, as some had speculated. Lambert sidestepped the question, responding that some parliamentarians had gone to Preval the previous week to warn him of the increasing support for the vote of no confidence. Preval reportedly told them what he later repeated to Senator Lambert during their visit to Santo Domingo March 15-16: he feared delaying this country's progress and advancement if forced to form a new government, but that he ''respected parliament's role.'' Lambert also reported that the executive branch may be planning a ministerial-level shuffle in order to head off a vote against Alexis. He specified that the finance minister, though well-respected, is thought to be too close to the president's presumed future wife, Elizabeth Delatour.

¶4. (C) Lambert admitted that it is hard to predict how parliament will vote on anything. Though currently in favor of the vote, the deputies are malleable (they ''flip flop'' Lambert commented in English) and subject to blandishments of the executive. Chamber President Eric Jean Jacques supports a vote of no confidence, but would prefer the vote come from the senate. Lambert, for his part, would prefer the vote come from the chamber, so that the senate can retain its reputation as the ''sensible'' house. Regardless, Lambert estimated that the vote will take place at the end of April, after the parliament has had some time to gain the public's confidence by ratifying several laws and accords, such as "the three laws (presumably on justice reform -- reftl), the newly-named monetization bureau, and grants from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

¶5. (C) Comment: Until now, Lambrt has been Alexis' staunchest ally in the parliment. His ready admission that

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Alexis has lost the confidence of both the chamber and the senate marks a seismic shift underneath Alexis' base of support. However, Alexis' removal is still not certain. Lambert unhesitatingly stated that a vote of no confidence should not be considered before the end of April, in which time much could happen to either further weaken or strengthen Alexis. Additionally, no obvious alternative acceptable to Preval and the fractious parliament has yet emerged, though Lambert raised the possibility of "your friend in the CEP," referring to former CEP Director General Jacques Bernard. Cause for some concern are the sources parliamentarian's discontent. While criticism of government inaction in a variety of areas is common, this criticism is arguably more justly directed at Preval, who continues to hold sway over the cabinet. Parliamentary impatience with Alexis seems more directly linked with the government's unwillingness to distribute largesse, either through jobs or pet projects. Preval, Alexis, and the cabinet all deserve credit for their restraint. A new Prime Minister more attuned to these demands may not be in Haiti's overall best interests.

TIGHE